1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Tin City

EASTWARD FROM SAVANNAH IN WEED-GROWN FIELDS lies Tin City, born of the depression and nurtured by the lean years that have followed. The little settlement, with its uncertain lanes winding through a maze of grass and tall shrubbery, stretches out over two hundred acres of land where long ago slaves labored in the black muck of rice fields.

To the west and south this land is touched by the ragged fringe of Savannah; to the north it sweeps away to the murky waters of the Savannah River. In 1819 the city of Savannah condemned the wet-culture rice lands and attempted to build up the unhealthy, low-lying acres with leaves and trash. With the passing years the place has been marked with peculiar ridges and mounds, the result of this building-up process. A wild growth of tall greenery covers the land.

About 1929 Louis Ellis, an old Negro who had been evicted from his home for non-payment of rent, secured permission from Savannah to settle on the land. His shack of discarded tin and his patch of a garden soon attracted other poverty stricken Negroes, and around him grew up a small community, self sufficient in its rent-free houses and its produce of garden and river. Although some of the settlers have abandoned the community and only about twenty remain, Tin City still leads its own independent existence. Within its precincts the fresh atmosphere of a country district prevails, for here and there a clump of chinaberry trees or an oak tree spreads shade, rows of sugar cane and

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Sapelo Island

131 SAPELO ISLAND IS ONE OF THE CHAIN OF "GOLDEN Isles" lying along the Georgia Coast. The word Sapelo was 103 derived from "Zapala," the name used by the Indians when the island was a favorite hunting ground for the tribes that had given up much of the mainland to the Spaniards and 172 later to the English. Among the landmarks that recall colorful historical episodes are Indian mounds, tabby ruins of colonial days, and the remains of a house built by Jean Berard Mocquet, Marquis de Montalet, a French Royalist who immigrated to Georgia from Santo Domingo about 1797.

000 Plantation life flourished on Sapelo in the early nineteenth century. Here Thomas Spalding conducted one of the most extensive agricultural enterprises in the coastal section. The "big house" on the south end of the island was a spacious tabby mansion, so strongly constructed that the original walls are still standing and form the nucleus of the present dwelling. The island, with the exception of a number of Negro homesteads, is now the property of Richard Reynolds of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but, although many improvements and changes have been made, much of the atmosphere of the early days has been preserved.

464 Industrial activity is concentrated in the central portion of Sapelo, where there is a sawmill that gives employment to many of the islanders. Nearby are the company houses, a 368 post office, and a store. Several Negro churches and a dance hall are located elsewhere on the island.

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

St. Simons Island

131 ST. SIMONS, ONE OF THE LARGER COASTAL ISLANDS, lies off the Georgia coast not far from Brunswick on the mainland. For about fifteen years it has been connected by (491) causeway and bridge to the Coastal Highway. St. Simons 177 has always had a considerable Negro population, owing to the fact that from early times many large plantations as well as smaller settlements flourished on the island. This has given the Negroes considerable contact with white people and of late years with the rather sophisticated type of 124 tourist. Fearing that the old customs would have been forgotten, we had little hope of good field work here.

However, we had not worked half a day in the north end settlements of the island before we were happily surprised. Around Harrington and Frederica there still live many old Negroes who remember the customs and beliefs told them by their parents and grandparents. Most of them are intelligent, reticent, and proud. Not easy of approach but with good manners, they responded to the request to help record the traditional beliefs of their forefathers. Once they had realized the object of our conversation, they talked freely and graciously, and several were outstanding for their keen comprehension.

115 We went to see Catherine Wing,* who lives at the corner of the Harrington Road and the main Frederica Highway. (342) Her comfortable frame house was set in the midst of a flower garden and her washtubs were conveniently placed under a (351) grape arbor and spreading live oaks.

(296)

* *Catherine Wing, St. Simons Island.*

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

malaw, and Edisto islands to Beaufort; down past St. Helena, Hunting, Fripp, and Parris islands; past Hilton Head and Daufuski to Savannah; from Tybee, Wassaw, Ossabaw, and St. Catherines to Sapelo; past St. Simons and Jekyll islands to Cumberland on the Georgia-Florida border—the Sea Islands guard the coast. The coastline is intersected not only by Winyah and Bull bays, Charleston Harbor, and St. Helena, Port Royal, Sapelo, and St. Andrew sounds, but also by many lesser inlets curling around the Sea Islands. Bounded on one side by the ocean and on the other by the salt marsh, these Sea Islands use the energy of wind and wave to build sand barriers that protect the mainland from storm and surf.

The Sea Islands north of Charleston are often older beach resorts such as Pawleys Island and the Isle of Palms. Their residents and visitors are mainly white. Other islands are wildlife sanctuaries such as the 31,000-acre Cape Romaine National Wildlife Refuge, the 20,000-acre Tom Yawkee Wildlife Center on South Island, and the 17,000-acre Belle W. Baruch research facilities on Hobcaw Barony. They serve as home for such endangered species as the bald eagle, the Eastern brown pelican, the short-nosed sturgeon, and the loggerhead turtle. Many islands south of Charleston are populated entirely or primarily by blacks, whose venerable folk culture and vivid creole language are the subject of this book. On the coastal mainland adjacent to the Sea Islands are black people who share that folk culture and that creole language. While they are not—strictly speaking—Sea Islanders, in many ways this book tells their story too.

For two centuries this coastal region has been the home of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Theirs is a sad but inspiring story. They built—in a very literal sense—the plantations, and they tilled the rich fields of rice, indigo, or Sea Island cotton. Some of the slaves were brought to the Sea Islands by Barbadian planters who migrated to the Carolina colony in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a refuge from the overcrowding of Barbados. Many more were imported directly from Africa. By the American Revolution the slaves, from various parts of Africa and from various ethnic and linguistic groups, had already created a distinctive culture. During the Civil War, when white planter families fled the Sea Islands before the invading Union troops, Sea Island blacks began to cultivate the land for themselves. Hundreds of them joined the Union Army in the celebrated First South Carolina Volunteers. On January 16, 1865, General William Tecumseh

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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[p. xxviii]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Preface

178 (131) The black inhabitants of the Sea Islands, located off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, have provided researchers with a reservoir of distinctively African and African-American cultural roots. Their unique society has been developed, nurtured, and maintained by the geographical isolation of the islands, the social and economic independence of the islanders, and the marginal contact with residents outside the Sea Island area. These factors have created and fostered an environment within which the inhabitants—West African slaves, ex-slaves, and their free ancestors—have been able to reinforce vigorous traditions characteristic of their culture, and to perpetuate communities with concentrations of African influences paralleled by no other black areas in the United States. Remnants of these African traditions were passed on to the islanders through narrative tales, religious practices, burial ceremonies, language patterns, and other practices, only some of which have been recorded by linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and folklorists.

177 Today changes are being brought to the islands, and the Sea Island culture is declining under the resulting social pressures. On the one hand, outsiders, particularly white Americans, Arabs, and other foreigners, are moving to the area and in some instances commercializing entire islands. On the other hand, the building of bridges has brought about easier access to many of the islands and better educational facilities and job opportunities for their inhabitants. As would be expected, such forces are motivating a break in cultural traditions, an upheaval of social patterns, and a general disruption of the old norms, all of which are now in some danger of becoming lost.

128 This book is structured to provide a comprehensive view of the Sea Island culture and literature and of the Gullah (or, as it is called in Georgia, Geechee) language. Chapter 1 is devoted primarily to a survey of the area and its people. I judge it important to provide a full

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2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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The Social History and Organization

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Me old building e de leak,
and me soul e got fe move:

There is a leak in this old building (body),
and my soul has got to move:

Topography

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The Sea Islands, commonly known as the Gullah- or Geechee-speaking communities, extend along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia to the tip of Florida. Isolated by expansive marshlands, turbulent streams, and massive rivers, some islands are several miles from the coast of the United States. Estimates indicate that there are as many as a thousand islands along the coastline, though many of them are small and unfit for human habitation.[1] The habitable ones vary in size. St. Helena, for example, covers only 15 square miles, while Wadmalaw extends for 43. Sandy Island, still not connected by bridge to the mainland, is estimated to be 50 square miles; Edisto is about 72; and Johns Island, the second largest island in U.S. waters, is approximately 100.[2]

131

The Sea Islands of South Carolina, on which most of this study is based, extend on the north from Sandy Island near Georgetown to Port Royal, St. Helena, and Daufuski on the south. Sandy Island is traditionally included among the Sea Islands of South Carolina because it is culturally similar to the coastal islands; it is, however, a freshwater

[p.4]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

river island rather than a saltwater ocean island.[3] The islands just off the coast of Charleston include James, Johns, Wadmalaw, Edisto, and Yonges, among many others. The Sea Islands of Georgia extend on the northern coast from Harris Neck; on the southern coast they include Sapelo, Darien, St. Simons, and St. Marys.

The Sea Islands and surrounding areas were a mere submerged portion of the continental shelf during the early geologic history of North America. As time passed, the ocean retreated to its present position, and the low flatlands left behind became known as the Georgia and Carolina low country.[4]

The Sea Islands are tranquil, flat, swampy lands with elevations ranging from near sea level to slightly over 100 feet. The climate is generally mild throughout the year, with very few recordings of drastically low temperatures. The coastal areas are characterized by slightly higher annual temperatures than other areas, primarily because of their proximity to the ocean.[5] The climatogram shown in Figure 1 illustrates the changes at various times of the year.

The Sea Island area is characterized by deep rivers snaking along the coast and dividing the land into countless large and small islands. The sandy soil, which drains inadequately, places economic and developmental constraints on the area. Road building is extremely difficult in spots; some islands still have no paved roads. The 1979 regional housing market analysis for the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester (BCD) Council of Governments estimated that 90 percent of the land area within Charleston County, which includes many of the Carolina Sea Islands, is composed of soils that put moderate to severe limitations on land use for urban development. The soil has poor load-bearing capacities, in addition to the prevailing poor drainage. Thus, financing for development must include provisions for land improvement as well as adequate drainage systems. Of the 2,614 square miles of land within the BCD region, only 5 percent has been developed for urban use; remaining portions of the coastal region are primarily rural.[6] Slightly more than half of the area is forest and woodlands. The marsh and swamplands, nearly a quarter of the total, grow little but marsh weeds, owing to the ebb and flow of daily tidal waters. These lands are flat and dangerous; there are reports of unfortunate islanders' being caught in "suckholes" or "mashmud" and never returning. The overall pattern of land use is summarized in Table 1.

Few bridges, with the exception of wooden crossings, connected

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Notes

Preface

1. For a note on the usefulness of interdisciplinary approaches see David DeCamp, "Toward a Generative Analysis of a Post-Creole Speech Continuum," in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, ed. Dell Hymes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 369.

2. For a detailed discussion of field procedures in general see Kenneth Goldstein, *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore* (Hatboro, N.C.: Folklore Assoc., 1964).

3. See ibid., p. 21.

4. Juanita Jackson, Sabra Slaughter, and J. Herman Blake, "The Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource," *Black Scholar*, March 1974, pp. 32–39.

5. For further discussion of entrance into Sea Island communities see Patricia Nichols, "Linguistic Change in Gullah: Sex, Age, and Mobility" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1976).

6. Goldstein, *Guide for Field Workers*, p. 173.

Introduction

1. The titles *Mr.* and *Miss* have more significance in Sea Island communities than they do outside. They are used in daily interaction with those who are felt to have earned particular respect, becoming part of their names.

2. See Lorenzo D. Turnèr, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 11–12.

Chapter 1

1. Jackson, Slaughter, and Blake, "The Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource," p. 32.

2. These estimates were derived primarily from the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester (BCD) Council of Governments' *Report on Economically Less Developed Areas in the Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Region*, 1980.

3. For a detailed discussion of the folk life and language of Sandy Island and the

Ro. 1697

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Prologue

The coastal region of the South Carolina Lowcountry, bounded on the north by Georgetown and on the south by Port Royal and St. Helena Sound, was the land of the Gullah slave population. Bordering on these coastal lowlands, stretching out into the arms of the sea, halfway between Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia are a fringe of fertile islands. The largest of these islands are Port Royal, Paris, Ladies, Hilton Head, and St. Helena.[1] Here indigo and the once famous long staple cotton were cultivated by the most isolated Gullah slaves, who also created and maintained a distinct, imaginative, and original African-American culture. Because their isolation precluded direct exposure to mass Euro-American influences, Sea Island Gullahs offer evidence of significant combinations of traditional retentions, American acculturation, and intergroup socialization.

The name "Gullah" is generally believed to be a shortened form of Angola. Africans from the Kongo-Angola region, Bantu-speaking peoples, were imported in large numbers during Carolina's early colonial history.[2] As early as 1742, the *South Carolina Gazette* advertised for a runaway slave called "Golla Harry." One of Denmark Vesey's coconspirators, "Gullah Jack," was reportedly born in Angola. An entry of the Charleston City Council for 1822 refers to "Gullah Jack" and his "Gullah or Angola Negroes." The Vesey trial record, however, simply refers to Jack as an African. Winifred Vass, in *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States*, points out that the ruler of the Mbundu nation in Central Africa was called the Ngola, from which the Portuguese named the colony. Vass suggests that this name was used by Europeans to refer to

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 17]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23

South Carolina

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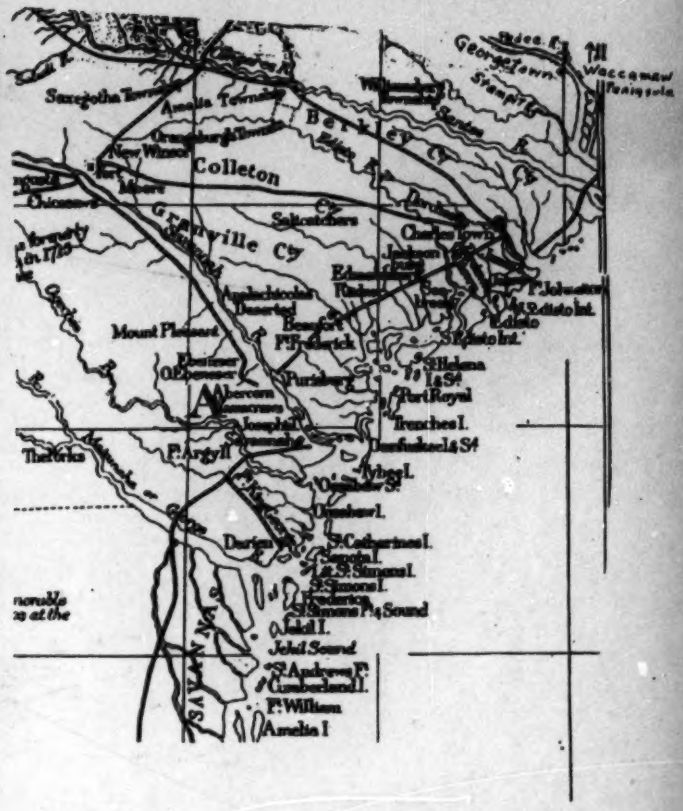

Map of the Sea Island Region. (From the South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, vol. 27, no. 4 [October 1926], 189.)

[p. 16]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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[P-VI]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
HN23 Sea Islanders HN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Star Hall to travel to other parts of the country to share their songs, in an effort to keep alive some of the older folk material. Each of these projects brought a complex mixture of success and problems and a renewed determination to keep trying.

For generations the Johns Island people were relatively isolated from mainstream America. The low, flat island, covered with tidal creeks and marshes, farmland, and forests of oaks draped with gray Spanish moss, was accessible only by boat until the early part of the century, when bridges and causeways connecting it with the mainland began to be built. Cut off from the mainland, these descendants of cotton plantation slaves retained many aspects of the old slave culture: a regional dialect, Gullah, still marked by distinctly African and Caribbean traits; a large body of folktales, cures, and supernatural beliefs; and a folk version of Christianity with a "shouting" style of singing old spirituals and hymns and a local "praise house" form of worship.

Old and new institutions existed side by side. For many people, Moving Star Hall—a tiny, battered clapboard building—had been the central meeting place for nearly fifty years. It housed a "tend-the-sick" and burial society, a secret lodge, and a community of worship. Here the members could express themselves freely and fully; in the Sunday night worship service each person took a turn preaching, testifying, praying, and raising a song.

Down the road a mile or so is Wesley Methodist Church, where a number of these same people attended regular Sunday services. Here the old folk ways were gradually being replaced by more formal modern practices. Wesley is a fine church with handsome pews, Methodist hymnals, a robed choir, and an organ. On the first Sunday of the month everyone listened to the Reverend G. C. Brown, who came from the mainland in the 1930s with a college degree, and sang hymns and spirituals led by the choir. But on the three Sundays a month when he preached in other churches, the congregation forgot about the organ and the hymnals and sang older spirituals, hymns, and shouts,

(P XII-A)

484 be a one-day affair by boat. Electricity did not become
365 available in some rural areas until the paving of a coastal
highway in 1936. In this isolated county the population re-
162 mained primarily of West African descent until the most recent
census. Of a total population of 33,500 in 1970, Georgetown
County had slightly more than fifty-one percent white resi-
dents--the first time that whites had outnumbered blacks
since the eighteenth century (Georgetown County Development
Plan, 1972; Rogers, 1970).

2.3 A Closed Community in Georgetown County

• 131 In more isolated portions of the county, blacks still
162 outnumber whites. One such area is a river island of approxi-
mately fifty square miles, whose two hundred permanent resi-
121 dents are black. The speech used by inhabitants of this
island, together with that of selected speakers in adjacent
mainland communities, is the focus of the present study.

505 In important senses, this island constitutes a closed
community. The vast majority of trips made off the island
are for jobs, school attendance, or to secure supplies. Few
people come onto the island without an express invitation
from some island resident, because of the difficulty of ac-
cess. The boat landing is unmarked and must be known to the
would-be visitor, and the distance between the mainland
landing and the isalnd is a two-mile boat trip which can be
hazardous for the unskilled boat driver, and even for the
skilled in bad weather.

5: Nichols I-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Georgetown

5: Nichols L-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Georgetown

(P.143-B)

6: Smith I,Y-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

CHAPTER I

AN ECOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF CONTEMPORARY SEA ISLAND SOCIETY

LOCATION OF THE ISLANDS

131 The five Sea Islands stretch along the Atlantic Sea Coast, south of the city of Charleston, South Carolina. The (491) Ashley River Bridge completed in 1922 connects the nearest sea island, James, to the southern tip of the city of Charleston. James Island is about two miles from Charleston.

131 The Wappo (Stono) River separates James from Johns 133 Island by way of the Maybank Highway; Johns is five miles from Charleston. The Wadmalaw Creek separates Johns from Wadmalaw Island. Wadmalaw's eastern body gulfs around the south easterly tip of Johns Island. On the north westerly side, the Wadmalaw Sound separates Wadmalaw and Yonges Islands. Yonges Island (also known as St. Paule Island) is neighbored on its north westerly side by the communities of Hollywood, Ravenal and by Megget to the northeast. Many native islanders ignore the distinction and consider these communities as part of the large island.

Edisto the most distant island is forty-two miles from Charleston. The Edisto beach area located on the southern tip of the island sits in the Atlantic Ocean. Edisto is the largest of the Sea Islands.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

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3. *Map Showing the Sea Islands*

[p. xxxii]

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

of the Sea Islands today one can find Negroes who have not seen a white man for several years.

The Gullah area still coincides with the tidewater or coastal plantation area. This is not due to the predominance of any particular type or tribe of Negroes, but to the isolation of the region as a whole from the up-country. In the early days travel in the rice area was chiefly by water. Indeed, it is only very recently that the chief towns of the low-country have been made easily accessible by land from the up-country. The low-country was and still is a geographical and cultural area distinct from the interior. Thus the dialect called Gullah was nourished in isolation and has survived with little change because of the continued isolation of its native area.

As has been pointed out by Bennett and others, the Gullah dialect upon close examination displays certain minor local variations in phonology and idiom. St. Helena Island is different from Edisto Island, and both are different from some of the other localities. Furthermore, on one island one can sometimes detect variations between one neighborhood or plantation and another. These facts merely demonstrate the variety of speech backgrounds represented by the colonial families and the assimilation of these varieties by the slaves.

The same isolation which explains the persistence of Gullah and its coincidence with the tidewater section is also responsible for the preservation of a seventeenth century mode of speech among the white people of that area. At the time of the settlement of Charleston, this mode of speech was standard English, in so far as there was such a thing at that time. It has come to be one of the earmarks

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)

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CHAPTER I

THE PRIZE OF THREE NATIONS

SAILING NORTHWARD in 1525 a hundred leagues from La Florida, Pedro de Quexos, pilot of Ayllon's two caravels, suddenly came upon a neck of land protruding abruptly seaward between two magnificent sounds. A closer examination showed the headland to be beautifully wooded with pines, cedars, and mighty live oaks gracefully festooned with funereal moss. Quexos thought that his saint, Elena, had certainly brought him good fortune in leading him to this garden spot on her day, and so in her honor he christened the projecting land in the name of Spain *Punta de Santa Elena*, and the broad river which bordered it Santa Elena. Today the point is the eastern projection of St. Helena Island, and Santa Elena River is now Port Royal Sound, but Ayllon's pilot gave the name which the English later applied to a sound, an island, and a parish.

THE SEA ISLANDS

St. Helena Island is one of the largest of the Sea Islands fringing the coast of South Carolina. It is fifteen miles in length and varies from three to five miles in width. Located practically midway by water between Charleston and Savannah, it is in the immediate vicinity of a natural harbor which was described by early explorers as one of the best on the entire Atlantic coast. Indeed, Jean Ribaut, commander of the first French expedition to Florida, pronounced it "one of the greatest and fayrest

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

havens of the worlde" where "without danger all the shippes in the worlde myght be harbored."[1]

The coastal region of which St. Helena Island forms a part is, as Ribaut described it, "a country full of havens, rivers and islandes." Deep tidal rivers cut and divide the land into numerous islands of varying sizes, and the islands themselves are interlaced by broad tidal creeks. These facts recommended the region to the Spanish, French, and English as an ideal place for settlement, for as Robert Sandford, "Secretary and Chief Register for the Lords Proprietors of their County of Clarendon" in Carolina, said in 1666:

> the whole Country is nothing else but severall Islands made by the various intervenings of Rivers and Creeks, yett are they firme good Lands (excepting what is Marsh) nor of soe smale a seize, but to continne many of them thousands of acres of rich habitable wood land, whose very bankes are washed by River or Creek, which besides the fertility adde such a comodiousnesse for portage as few Countryes are equally happy in.[2]

These geographic conditions have also made for the isolation of the region. The soil is a light sand which makes road building difficult. The numerous marshes have to be crossed by causeways and the rivers by long bridges. It requires, therefore, a considerable outlay of capital to provide modern transportation facilities for the Sea Islands. As a result, most of them are still without bridges and good roads; they have been left to develop as they might. Today, in going to St. Helena Island, one must cross three rivers and two islands before one at last

[1] Jeannette T. Connor (ed.), *Jean Ribaut, The Whole & True Discouerye of Terra Florida*, pp. 90-91.

[2] A. S. Salley, Jr. (ed.), *Narratives of Early Carolina*, p. 101.